

OUT OF TIME

Issue No. 11

Out of Control--Lesbian Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners

September, 1991

BARALDINI HEALTH STATUS UPDATE

The BOP is not in the business of providing decent medical care for prisoners. Few prisons even have licensed physicians. They usually have a Physician's Assistant (P.A.), but an inmate in medical crisis must depend on a guard to notify the P.A. Federal officials are notorious for denying and delaying treatment, confiscating necessary medication, or medicating prisoners to death or near death situations. (See "Isabelle Suarez Remembered")

In July after weeks of deliberate and dangerous delays, Silvia Baraldini was finally given the tests that showed she did not have a recurrence of cancer. She contracted uterine cancer during her two year incarceration in the Lexington Control Unit, 1987-1989. Silvia underwent two surgical procedures and intensive radiation therapy, and she needs regularly scheduled follow-up exams. Prison officials have been very lax about this.

Last April, Silvia had a CAT scan (again overdue) that showed a possible recurrence of cancer. She needed immediate confirmation of this test. The BOP made no effort to get the proper medical care for Silvia until July, after receiving hundreds of letters and mailgrams demanding these tests be completed. Thankfully the tests were negative. We wish to express our appreciation to all of you who participated in the campaign to help Silvia.

ISABELLE SUAREZ REMEMBERED

When Isabelle Suarez arrived at Chicago MCC her anti-epileptic medication was confiscated by prison authorities. She died of a coma after multiple epileptic seizures. The guard thought she was faking and Isabelle received no help until another prisoner on the floor called 911 from the prison pay phone.

...The ultimate expression of Law is NOT order--it is prison. There are hundreds and hundreds of prisons and thousands upon thousands of laws, yet there is no social order, no social peace... George Jackson

IT WAS TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY...

August 21, 1971 George Jackson was shot dead at San Quentin in an incident that claimed six other lives. Prison authorities claimed they'd thwarted an escape attempt. But all independently verified evidence disproves their story. George was murdered because he was a leader who was being heard; and even worse than that, he was a convict.

On September 9, 1971 in a rebellion against intolerable conditions, 1500 mostly Black and Puerto Rican prisoners seized control of D yard at Attica, a maximum joint in New York. After four days of positive negotiations and national media attention, then governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered thousands of police, national guards, and prison guards to attack. The prisoners were gassed by helicopters as high powered rifle and machine guns fired into D yard. Forty-three died that day--all at the hands of the authorities. Some were murdered as they lay face down in the mud and many were tortured.

It's twenty years later and September 30 is the court date

for the start of a long overdue civil case on the behalf of those men victimized by the state in the Attica rebellion.

At the same time of these two historic murders by the state, a young Vietnam vet and leader of the Black Panther Party was sitting in LA county jail awaiting trial. Twenty years later Geronimo Ji Jaga (Pratt) still is locked in a prison cell. COINTELPRO had Geronimo in it's sights and he was framed for a murder he could not have committed because he wasn't even in LA at the time.

There was an event September 13 in Oakland to commemorate these events. To remember, to reflect, to realize that prison conditions are even worse today, to know that more than one million women and men are now locked away, to be aware that there are political prisoners and Prisoners of War in the u.s.

FREE GERONIMO PRATT

URGENT ACTION ALERT

The Western Shoshone Indians have lived as a nation in the Great Basin region of central Nevada for centuries. They have always lived off the land, raising livestock, hunting, gardening, protecting the eco system of the Great Basin and recently working together with environmental and peace movements in the area.

The Dann Band (an extended family group) are traditional Western Shoshone. In 1973 a federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) official served the Dann sisters with a trespass notice for grazing their cattle and horses on land claimed by the federal government. However, the land had already been recognized as Western Shoshone in 1863 when the u.s. government signed the Treaty of Ruby Valley,

a treaty of "peace and friendship."

The court battles, lasting 18 years, ended in June 1991. All motions by the Dann sisters and the Western Shoshone National Council were denied. They are still refusing to obey the orders of the federal government. We can help by sending letters, faxes, or calls to Senator D. Inouye, Chairman on Indian Affairs, US Senate, Washington, DC 20510. Fax #202-224-6747. Tel (202) 224-3934. Donations can be sent to Dann Defense Fund c/o Western Shoshone National Council, PO Box 69, Duckwater, Nevada 89314. More information can be requested from American Peace Test, PO Box 26728, Las Vegas, Nevada 89126.

PRISON AND OTHER "JUST-US" STATS

80% of the men at the Marion Lockdown Prison are eligible for transfer to lower security prisons.

Who goes to prison:

Of Black women, 1.5%; Of white women, 0.02%

There are one million people in prison in the u.s. 50% are people of color.

African-Americans receive the death penalty 6 times greater than other people.

Since the entire prison was locked down at Marion, IL in 1983, 36 states have built control units.

More women than men entering prison are HIV+. In 1989 in New York 20% of the women entering prison were HIV-infected.

MICHIGAN WOMEN PRISONERS WIN EQUAL EDUCATION

Michigan women prisoners filed a class action suit in 1978 claiming violation of their right to equal protection because they weren't provided educational vocational training programs comparable to male prisoners. *Glover v. Johnson*, 934 F.2d 703 (6th Cir. 1991) has been kicked around and around ever since.

The most recent appeal was in the women's favor. It upheld civil contempt and requires a special administrator to oversee the prison's programs.

NEW PRISON NEWSLETTER

There are many newsletters produced by people inside. Some are political, some literary, some focus on pen-pals. A woman serving time in Virginia asked us to put in an announcement soliciting subscriptions and articles for a new quarterly newsletter/network dealing with survivors of childhood sexual abuse both in and out of prison. She hopes to "help survivors in their healing process and to educate the general public that incest and child abuse happens in all families and in all cultures and races." Subscriptions are \$7.00 a year. Send questions or information to Cheryl Bonfanti, PO Box 1, Goochland, VA 23063.

Out of Control would like to thank the Resist foundation for a grant of \$550 received in June to help with the costs of the newsletter. Donations to Resist are tax deductible. If you want to either give them money or ask them for it, their address is Resist/ One Summer St./ Somerville, MA 02143-9990.

A study of a \$4 billion federal job training program found that women and Blacks are being channeled into lower-paying jobs. 55% of white men receive electronics instruction leading to jobs that pay \$7.50/hr. Only 26% of Black men receive this same training.

Blacks are more likely to get help in looking for jobs, without any education or on-the-job training. Women more often receive classroom training but only for low paying positions.

BATTERED WOMEN FIGHT BACK

According to the National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women, over one million women are battered by husbands or boyfriends each year. About 750 a year are accused of killing their abusive mates. There is a growing public awareness of battered women that is slowly being reflected in court decisions. In the last 2 years, governors of 10 states have reviewed cases and granted clemency for women convicted of murder in abusive situations.

A July 1991 survey in Glamour Magazine found that 88% of the respondents felt that repeated beatings could lead to such a state of hopelessness that murder was the only alternative and 81% felt that such a murder should be considered self-defense and clemency granted.

Two years ago inmates at the California Institute for Women (CIW) at Frontera formed a support group called Convicted Women Against Abuse. In the last few months they've launched a formal petition campaign to urge California governor Wilson to review the cases of the 34 women at CIW, many with life sentences, imprisoned for killing abusive husbands. The women at CIW feel this campaign for clemency is their best chance for help from a system they feel has abandoned and abused them.

Wilson has agreed to review each case individually, but no action has yet been taken. Letters can be written to governor Wilson, State Capital, Sacramento CA 95814 urging him to begin reviewing these cases.

Christy Camp is serving a 16 year to life sentence at CIW for killing her abusive husband in a violent incident where she was not the aggressor. Following are excerpts from a letter she wrote:

"Battered women syndrome is not a well liked subject. You won't find people talking about it at cocktail parties, bridge clubs or supermarket check-out lines. But it's out there; just like AIDS, homelessness, child abuse, toxic waste. It can be happening to your neighbor, friend or loved one and you do not know because the victim is too ashamed or threatened to tell you.

"I believe there is hope. But I can't do it on my own. You can help by sending your support to Governor Wilson ... or by submitting petitions. Thank you."

We will have more information in the next newsletter and petitions at our tables.

LAGAI

3543--18th St., Box #26

San Francisco, CA 94110

STOP THE CONGRESSIONAL VAMPIRES NOW

by Kate

The u.s. senate has taken the process of mandatory testing and criminalizing people with HIV to a new level. A new Helms Amendment, recently passed 55-44, makes it a crime for "a ... physician, dentist, nurse or other health care provider, knowing that he is infected with [HIV to] intentionally provide medical or dental treatment to another person, without prior notification to such person of such infection...." This "crime" would carry a sentence of one year in prison or a \$10,000 fine or both.

An additional amendment imposes the same penalties on patients who refuse to be tested at the request of a "licensed health professional," except in an "emergency where the patient's life is in danger." Meanwhile, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is developing a list of procedures which HIV+ workers should not (be allowed to) perform.

The rationale behind all this is five well-publicized cases of transmission from one dentist. Employees of that dentist said he didn't always sterilize his instruments and reused equipment meant to be used only once. Until then, in ten years of the epidemic with 5,800 reported cases of AIDS in health workers, there has not been one documented case of transmission from a health worker to a patient. CDC puts the risk of infection from a surgeon at between 1 in 43,000 and 1 in 416,000 (quite a range); half that of being struck by lightning.

Yet not only Helms and his cronies, but "liberals" like Ted Kennedy have caved into this hysteria, calling for mandatory "voluntary" testing of health workers.

If the Helms Amendments or anything like them become law, PWAs and People with HIV will be dropped like hot potatoes by doctors and hospitals--faster than they already are. While the AMA has said it's unethical for doctors to refuse care to people because they are HIV+, we know they're not going to make doctors do things which could,

even remotely, cost them their jobs. (AMA doesn't support the senate bills, by the way.)

And there's lots of ways of dumping patients without saying, "Sorry, you're positive." People we know have already been sent home from emergency rooms and hospitals with raging fevers, having been told, "There's nothing we can do for you." PWAs with a history of drug use have been dropped by medical clinics in the Bay Area because of allegations that they're abusing pain meds. Poor people are routinely denied care, even barred from hospital grounds.

There are an estimated 70,000 HIV+ health workers in the u.s. If they are prohibited from performing "invasive procedures," most hospitals and clinics will not employ them at all; that want staff who can take care of anything that comes up. That means an already critical shortage of health workers will get worse, and the level of care, notably for low-or-no-income people, which is already horrible, will get even horribler.

Health workers in the Bay Area and around the country are organizing to stop this attack. A newly formed Committee for Health and Social Justice at SF General co-sponsored a forum and a demonstration with ACT UP/SF (the demo, on September 11, drew about 200 folks). The ACLU and a few other liberal groups have also come out against the legislation.

We need a more concerted strategy, however. A number of states already have or are considering some form of mandatory testing for health workers. This is a move more insidious but just as dangerous as the LaRouche initiatives: if they can test all the health workers and people requiring medical care, it's won't be long before they're testing everybody.

Time to reactivate the AIDS Action/Resistance Pledges? We think so!

BENEFIT READING FOR BARBARA RUTH

Barbara Ruth, a long-time anarchist lesbian activist was recently made homeless by the pesticing of her home. She is chemically injured and has lost her possessions due to contamination. Her medical/bureaucratic/logistical costs are staggering. Her friends have organized a benefit reading of her works on:

**Saturday, 10/5, at 7 p.m.
First Congregational Church
2345 Channing Way (near Dana)**

Accessibility info: Wheelchair accessible, EI seating area, call 848-5966 at least one week in advance for child care or ASL. Please no scents.

If you can't attend, but would like to help, call Susan at 658-3300.

**RESTROOMS FOR
CUSTOMERS ONLY**

All others pee in this doorway

--Queers for Social Justice sticker

Can we talk?

Due to popular demand, LAGAI is continuing its series of discussion groups. For the months of October and November the topics of discussion are:

Saturday, October 5: Where are the AIDS and Lesbian and Gay Movements Going?

Sunday, October 20: The State of the Labor Movement and the Economy

Saturday, November 2: Feminism and the Lesbian and Gay Community

Sunday, November 17: Cuba and the u.s. International Agenda

**All discussion groups will be at 3:00 p.m.
Please call 558-8671 for location.**

T-Shirts Available

LAGAI and Out of Control's "Lesbians who sleep with Dykes" and DAGGER's "New World Disorder" t-shirts are now available by mail. The t-shirts are all-cotton, and are available in sizes small to 3X (larger sizes sold out). They cost \$15.00 per shirt. Make checks out to LAGAI, and send to BOX 26/ 3543 18th St., SF, CA 94110.

NORMA JEAN BENEFIT

The Norma Jean Croy Benefit at the Women's Building on July 20th was great. Thank you for all your support. Hooty (Norm's brother) was able to come and speak to us and he received a standing ovation. He serves as an example of a brother who has survived against incredible odds and continues to support his sister. As we know, the struggle is not over till all of us are free.

It is our belief that if we take \$ from our community, we have a responsibility to be open and honest about where it went. So here is our accountability to you:

Income \$2701.25
Expenses 542.80
Profits \$2158.45

\$1079.22 to Norm's new trust fund

\$1079.23 + 322.00 (t-shirt sales)=\$1401.23 to Defense Committee

MORE ON NORMA JEAN

Support for Norma Jean has been growing right along. That's important! We hear that a writ of habeas corpus was recently filed and that means the time for active support grows nearer. Stay tuned for what you can do.

Solidarity statements were received from Merle Woo, local Socialist feminist activist and educator, and Barbara Smith, writer and publisher of Kitchen Table Women of Color Press in Albany, New York.

Excerpt from Merle Woo's statement:

People of color, women, lesbians, and gays will not tolerate anymore Wounded Knees, false imprisonments, police brutality. We will fight back against government occupation of native lands, like the Mohawks' courageous stand against the US and Quebec governments, SQ and FBI. And although it may seem that we are momentarily defeated, we are like a gathering storm.

SUPPORTERS OF COMMISSARY FUND RECEIVE DEATH THREATS

by Marilyn

This tale of racist terror takes place in Lexington, Kentucky . . . yep, that's the same old bluegrass town where the female high security unit, ("HSU"), was in operation from '86 - '88. During those years Alejandrina, Silvia and Susan received a lot of support from local dykes. More recently, since the arrival of Laura Whitehorn, the Lexington dykes started organizing again and formed a group called "Cultural Resistance Conspiracy." The first public event they're having is a poetry reading, a fund raiser for the LAGAI/OOC commissary fund. With the event planned from September 16, at a local cafe, they began receiving threatening letters early in the month. The letters primarily target one of the readers, Shirley Hayden-Whitley, a Black, Lesbian poet and writer, threatening her life and the safety of others if the event goes forward. (There are repeated references to "black, dyke, bitch.") (We hope to be able to publish at least one of the letters in the future.)

One of the members of the Cultural Resistance Conspiracy has also found her dog's collar around the neck of a dead possum on her porch - along with a threatening letter. The same sister has been followed and another found her front door tampered with. Despite it all they're going ahead with the event. We welcome these sisters to the movement and wish to express the tremendous respect we have for their bravery and persistence.

Barbara Smith's statement:

The case of Norma Jean Croy devastatingly illustrates the type of unequal justice that people of color, women, working people, lesbians, and gay men routinely get from capitalist America's corrupt legal system. Imprisoning us in huge numbers, giving us far harsher sentences, reserving the death penalty almost exclusively for people of color, and doing almost nothing to provide training and educational opportunities in prison are all part of the ongoing genocidal attacks against our communities.

But we have news for them. We refuse to let them get away with it. By organizing together we will fight back! As a Black lesbian, a feminist, and a socialist I am glad to join in the coalition effort to spread the word and to free our sister Norma Jean Croy.

HUNGER STRIKE AT FOLSOM

Is a hunger strike of 3300 news? Not when the strikers are prisoners. On Saturday, Sept. 7, 1991, 3300 prisoners (yes, 3300) at Folsom prison conducted a one-day hunger strike to protest proposed changes in visitation rules. In order to receive visitors, an inmate would be required to have \$40.00 in their account, and the visitor would be required to spend at least \$20.00 for tv dinners. This money would be used to train prison guards. The prisoners are also facing a 5 percent pay cut.

The husbands of three women in the California Visitors Cooperative, which is providing support for the inmates, have been placed in segregation, and have been threatened with transfer to the "special holding unit" at Pelican Bay.

The California Visitors Cooperative is asking that letters be sent to James Gomez, Director of Corrections, Box 942883, Sacramento, CA 94283-0001.

The Media Pirates versus the sent-from-hell

In August the sentinel began a three-part series by John Morrison entitled "Is Feminism Hurting Gay Men." People will remember John Morrison from a series of anti-lesbian/anti-woman letters and columns in the gay papers in the last few years. Ray Chalker, the editor of the Sentinel, recently made a lot of enemies for renting his bar out to film the anti-lesbian movie, Basic Instincts. He also fired a woman editor this spring, and was heard to declare that there were just too many "fucking dykes" around him.

The first part of Morrison's article was met with a lot of anger. The second part was met with a series of three posters that were wheat-pasted around the Castro and other parts of San Francisco. Our favorite had a picture of an armed woman, and read "Is Feminism Hurting Gay Men? NOT YET." The third issue was met, apparently early in the morning, by The Media Pirates, an anonymous group of activists who left a leaflet in its place at a number of locations.

The leaflet declared that the action wasn't either ACT-UP or Queer Nation and that "Ray Chalker should not be controlling what we know about each other by purposely trying to suppress and distort information. Owning a newspaper does not give him the right to spread hate and dissension. We don't have the money to buy the opportunity to be heard, so we have taken power in our own hands and put the Sentinel in the trash where it belongs."

Write-on Media Pirates!

the Joint page

prepared by LAGAI and Out of Control

WOMEN PRISONERS CONFRONT AIDS

by Linda Evans

To die of AIDS in prison is to die twice as fast as PWA's on the outside; to die shackled to a bed with metal chains on both hands and both feet, your family usually denied visits (or they're too far away, or too poor). To live with HIV in prison is to be isolated and afraid that rumors about you will spread, that your "friends" will stop speaking to you, that suddenly your cellmates will force you to move; to worry about hugging your children and telling your family; to feel you will die without ever being free. To be locked up and have friends and loved ones infected with HIV is to feel totally powerless to help them or support them; to worry through long sleepless nights; to know you will never again see them alive.

So it is for us at FCI-Pleasanton, a federal women's prison, about 50 miles from San Francisco, where all of our lives have been intimately touched by AIDS. Most of the 900 women prisoners here know or love someone with HIV; many of us are HIV+ ourselves. Until recently, though, HIV has been largely invisible here--there has been no AIDS education at all. Women who are diagnosed with AIDS are transferred to the women's medical facility/prison at Lexington Kentucky. HIV antibody tests are available both by request, and as part of a periodic mandatory sampling, but there has been no pre- or post-test counselling. No special diets or vitamins are made available for HIV+ women; AZT is the only permitted treatment.

Some of this is now changing because of a peer education program, newly named PLACE (Pleasanton AIDS Counseling and Education). We knew it was extremely important that this group be representative of the most-affected communities and of the population here. In order that the group be representative of the entire population, the project was discussed in the Black Cultural Workshop, Four Winds Cultural Group (Native American women), and the Latina Club. About half of us are lesbians; many of us have HIV+ family members or friends who have died of AIDS; some of us are HIV+. A psychology staff member had long been designated as "responsible for AIDS education," and he became the sponsor for our group.

Our first project was self-education, because we all had different areas of knowledge and experience with AIDS. Not all of us can read well--or read English--, so we began a search for educational materials in Spanish. We tried to find information specifically about women, and that answered our questions as lesbians about transmission and safe sex. From the beginning we have tried to make this our program--defined by women prisoners and our needs, and run by us, within the extremely restricted context of being in prison. In our self-education phase, this meant each of us taking responsibility for a very basic presentation on different aspects of AIDS/HIV. This wasn't easy for many of the women in the group; most of us have never formally spoken in front of even small groups of people. But in this process we were also confronting deeper issues: empowerment and self-direction.

In women's prisons, prisoners have no power over the tiniest details of life, and one of the main methods of control is to constantly treat us like children. (In some ways this is just an intensification of how women are treated in

mainstream heterosexual society; in prison it's enforced by threats, confinement, and physical violence.) So the small steps of learning new information and teaching it to others, or of figuring out goals and programs of AIDS education for our sister prisoners, are really giant steps in the process of empowerment, commitment, and enhancing our self-esteem. Important lessons in sensitivity towards others are being learned, too: those of us who are more verbal or more "educated" are learning to listen and learn from women of many different backgrounds. Together we are gradually creating an environment where all of us can participate equally.

PLACE encountered no major opposition from the prison administration as long as we focussed on self-education. As we became more confident of our knowledge, we began to develop a program of general AIDS education for the whole population. We made up a true/false questionnaire in English and Spanish, which we will distribute to the whole institution just before we hold open forum discussion groups in each living unit. We're producing a poster (with cartoons) and bringing in speakers from AIDS service/information agencies. We plan a series of AIDS video showings, and we've been granted permission to help with a presentation at new inmate orientation.

But approval to distribute the questionnaire, hold the discussion groups/speakers, and display the poster hasn't been forthcoming from the administration. The only concrete step the administration has taken is to officially reject our proposal that a list of PLACE members should be provided by medical staff to all the HIV+ women here, so they could choose among us if they wanted peer counselling. (Ironically that in a situation where prisoners' privacy and medical confidentiality is routinely violated by staff, their reason to stop peer counseling is the Bureau of Prisons' "concern" over potential violations of confidentiality by inmates.) Of course, we will continue to act as peer counsellors anyway, with or without official permission; this means that the hugs we give to comfort each other will be illegal, instead of part of a permitted counseling session!

PLACE is still in the earliest stages of its development, but we are grateful for the help and support we've received from AIDS activists and service agencies outside. WE NEED YOU. Supporting our peer education programs and supporting prisoners with AIDS is a concrete way to fight racism in the AIDS movement, to build alliances with other communities affected by the AIDS crisis, and to meet the needs of increasing numbers of women with HIV. We need your videos, literature and speakers. We need outside support in demanding that treatment alternatives be made available to us inside. We need help in fighting against segregation in housing, against mandatory testing, for confidentiality, and for compassionate early release. And prisoners with HIV especially need your active assistance when we are released--so we can receive the treatments and services we need, so we can re-join our communities and fight to live.

[Linda called recently to say that Pleasanton has finally given permission for the quiz and unit discussions and she expects approval for the poster. The first unit meeting will be held on Sept. 24.]

AIDS and Women

at Bedford Hills Maximum Security Prison

ACE (AIDS Counseling and Education) was formed in 1987 at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York. It is one of only a few peer support and education groups for incarcerated women. There have been times in the last four years that ACE has been disbanded by prison authorities and times it has been allowed to function. The women at Bedford Hills in ACE found that their grassroots approach to AIDS work made a major difference inside the prison. The following excerpts are from an article written by Judy Clark and Kathy Boudin for a 1989 issue of *Social Justice*. *Both women have worked with ACE since its inception, have been activists for over 25 years, and are currently serving a life sentence and a 25-year sentence, respectively, at Bedford Hills.*

Introduction

In Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, New York State's maximum security prison for women, AIDS has created a crisis. A recent study showed that almost 20% of the incoming women were HIV infected.

The situation at Bedford is not unique. Statistics show that HIV has had a devastating impact on low-income Black and Latin communities. In both New York State and New York City, over 50% of the people with AIDS are Black and Latin. Black and Latin people represent a disproportionately high 80% of New York State inmates. These statistics point to the need for AIDS work in the prisons.

The prison system is faced with deep contradictions in working to meet the crisis of AIDS. On the one hand, studies show that the most effective means for controlling the spread of HIV infection has been grass-roots mobilization, community empowerment, and culturally specific organization. Yet prison life is predicated on absolute security and control by prison administrators. The empowerment of prisoners is viewed as contrary to the needs of security. Furthermore, there is no way to deal with AIDS without engaging issues of sex and drugs. Yet because both are illegal inside a prison, prison officials are loathe to allow open discussion, let alone to provide the means to pursue sex or drug use more safely.

There are additional obstacles to addressing the AIDS crisis for women. Women are the fastest-growing population becoming infected with HIV. Moreover, women bear much of the social burden of the epidemic, particularly in Black, Latin, and poor urban communities. Women's own humanity and needs are rendered unimportant. The medical establishment has not studied the particularity of HIV infection in women. Women are excluded from most drug trials. The Center for Disease Control does not track women-to-women transmission. Their invisibility serves to disarm and disempower women struggling with AIDS.

ACE, Prison, and Community

ACE is a prison program that is making a difference in the AIDS crisis at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. ACE is an organization initiated and built by women prisoners and officially recognized by the prison administration. It is a program of peer education, counseling, support, and health advocacy. In addition, ACE is a spirit of sisterhood and community, encouraging group and individual self-respect and initiative. It has as its broadest goal the empowerment of the prison community in order to deal with all the ways that AIDS affects it.

Outside the prison, the gay community had become a model of community empowerment in addressing the AIDS crisis. Moreover, within the gay community, PWAs were

not allowing themselves to be denied or victimized, but instead were playing a leading role. The principles of community self-consciousness, peer education, and support all became associated with responding to the AIDS crisis.

We brought certain strengths as women. There is a tradition of nurturing and caring that can be drawn on for AIDS work. Women take an interest in each other's personal problems. They give each other advice as part of friendships. Women can establish deep emotional-support systems. Women in prison seek relationships and bond with each other. There is less homophobia and denial of homosexual relations within a women's prison than in a men's prison. Consequently, there was a more open atmosphere to deal with issues of sexuality, which is imperative in AIDS work. It also meant that we could easily identify with and draw upon the example of the gay community outside.

By June 1988 we were ready to begin developing outreach programs with population...However, during the summer months, ACE's work was painfully brought to a complete stop...through a series of bureaucratic obstacles. Because sex does go on in prisons, administrators are faced with the dilemma of having to distribute condoms and dental dams in order to prevent the spread of HIV infection. A few jail and prison systems are doing so; Vermont, Philadelphia, New York City, and Mississippi are examples. Most, including the New York State Department of Corrections, oppose this policy. [Also] peer education and support combined with self-initiated inmate organization...is seen by the system as a potential threat to prison security and control.

When ACE reconvened in November 1988, one central goal was to create more humane conditions for PWAs. An agreement with the Medical Department was reached that enabled ACE members to participate in medical consultations as health advocates in cases where individual women requested it. The PWAs in ACE who have chosen to speak openly...are magnets to other women in the population who are HIV positive, seeking comradeship, advice, hugs, and inspiration. Their courage and example of living with AIDS give others strength. They are key medical advocates and organize support groups. PWAs struggle within ACE to keep the needs of PWAs central to our work.

Conclusion

The experience of ACE suggests that a grass-roots approach to AIDS work can make a difference inside prisons. ACE is a model for other communities in that the fight against AIDS is best carried out by those people most deeply affected by it. Prisons can be training grounds in which people can become educated, experienced, and committed to AIDS work and they can return to their communities where they can make significant contributions. Within those communities, as in Bedford, women are living with AIDS, affected by all aspects of the epidemic. In ACE we have seen that women can become a motive force in the battle against AIDS.

THANKS, RESIST (AGAIN)

LAGAI has just been awarded a grant from the RESIST foundation to produce our anti-draft, counter-recruitment pamphlet for lesbians and gay men. Out of Control also received a grant from RESIST this year, to pay for their newsletter, Out of Time. To contribute to RESIST or get info about them, you can contact them at One Summer Street, Somerville, MA 02143; (617) 623-5110.